

Section 2: General Information

What Is MI-Access? 1

Why Was MI-Access Developed? 1

On What Is MI-Access Based? 2

Who Will Be Assessed? 3

Who Decides Which Assessment a Student Takes? 4

When Will MI-Access Be Administered? 4

How Will Phase 1 MI-Access Results Be Reported? 5

How Will the State Use MI-Access Results? 5

ABOUT MI-ACCESS

This section of the training packet contains general information about MI-Access, why it was developed, and the students it will assess. The information contained in it should answer many of your questions about the overall program.

What Is MI-Access?

MI-Access is a statewide assessment program designed for students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams have determined that the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is not appropriate for them, even with assessment accommodations.

At present, there are two assessments in MI-Access—Participation and Supported Independence. Together, these assessments are referred to as Phase 1 MI-Access, which was administered for the first time statewide in 2002.

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS) is in the process of developing additional assessments called Phase 2 MI-Access. They are tentatively scheduled for statewide administration in winter 2005. Since Phase 2 MI-Access is not yet developed, the focus of the remaining information in this section will be on Phase 1.

Rather than a paper-and-pencil test, Phase 1 MI-Access relies, more appropriately, on teacher observation. Teachers observe students as they carry out a standard set of activities during the course of a normal school day and score them using a standardized scoring guide.

MI-Access is one component of Michigan's Educational Assessment System (MEAS). Other components include the MEAP, the MEAP with assessment accommodations, and ELL-Access for English Language Learners.

Why Was MI-Access Developed?

There are many important reasons why MI-Access was developed. First, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) requires

- the inclusion of students with disabilities in both state- and district-wide assessment systems;
- that state and local districts develop guidelines to ensure participation in assessment; and
- that states develop an alternate assessment for those students for whom the general state assessment is inappropriate even with assessment accommodations.

MI-Access is the state-level “alternate assessment” that Michigan developed to comply with this legislation.

Second, there are other federal requirements that also influenced, and continue to influence, the development of MI-Access. Those laws include

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA),
- Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 (ESEA), and most recently,
- the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

In different ways, these laws maintain that assessments are an integral part of educational accountability systems because they provide information that can benefit students by measuring their progress against agreed-upon standards. They also maintain that all students—including those with disabilities—should be part of a single accountability system and should not be treated separately.

Third, MI-Access was developed in an effort to help achieve the State Board of Education (SBE) goal of “attaining substantial and meaningful improvements in the academic achievement of all students with a primary emphasis on chronically under-performing schools.” MI-Access does that in a variety of ways. It provides

- access to the high standards reflected in Michigan’s Model Content Standards for the general curriculum;
- access to the statewide assessment system, which many students with disabilities have not previously had; and
- access to meaningful results showing student progress.

Finally, MI-Access was developed to provide teachers, administrators, and parents with (1) building- and district-level student performance data for use in the school improvement process and curriculum development, and (2) classroom and individual student performance information for use in enhancing other assessment measures and efforts to evaluate student progress and needs.

On What Is MI-Access Based?

MI-Access builds upon the Model Content Standards and Benchmarks contained in the *Michigan Curriculum Framework*. It also is connected to previous validated research, such as that supported by the Council for Exceptional Children.

In addition, the assessment activities in MI-Access reflect the performance expectations found in *Addressing the Unique Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities* (AUEN). In November 1998, the SBE approved the use of the AUEN’s performance expectations as a framework for developing MI-Access assessment activities because they are examples of tools and strategies teachers can use to help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum. The AUEN is not intended to replace what teachers are already using to anchor instruction, but can help enhance and focus instruction.

Who Will Be Assessed?

Phase 1 MI-Access

As mentioned earlier, MI-Access is being implemented in two phases. In Phase 1, there are two assessments: MI-Access Participation and MI-Access Supported Independence. MI-Access *Participation* assessments are for students who have, or function as if they have, *severe or profound* cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require *extensive* ongoing support in adulthood. They may also have both significant cognitive and physical impairments that limit their ability to generalize or transfer learning and thus may make determining their actual abilities and skills difficult. For that reason, *Participation* assessments focus on how a student responds to the *opportunity* to participate in an activity rather than on how well he or she carries out that activity.

The MI-Access *Supported Independence* assessment is designed for students who have, or function as if they have, *moderate* cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require *ongoing* support in adulthood. They may also have both cognitive and physical impairments that impact their ability to generalize or transfer learning; however, they usually can follow learned routines and demonstrate independent living skills. The *Supported Independence* assessments, therefore, are designed to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Specifically, they measure how students perform certain tasks, while acknowledging that they may require some allowable level of assistance to do so.

Phase 1 MI-Access assessments are administered once each year to students who are 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, and 18 years old. Students must be that age on or before December 1st of the school year in which the assessment is carried out. These ages were selected because (1) most students taking part in Phase 1 MI-Access are not assigned a grade level, and (2) it ensures that students with disabilities are assessed with the same frequency as general education students (that is, they correspond with the grades assessed by the MEAP).

Phase 2 MI-Access

In Phase 2—which is expected to be implemented statewide in 2005—Michigan is developing additional state assessments for students whose IEP Teams have determined it is not appropriate for them to take the MEAP, the MEAP with assessment accommodations, MI-Access Participation, or MI-Access Supported Independence. This involves an exceptionally wide range of students.

For example, the majority of students taking part in Phase 2 MI-Access will be those who have, or function as if they have, *mild* cognitive impairment. These students are capable of meeting their own needs and living successfully in their communities without overt support from others. They are also able to assess their personal strengths and limitations and access resources, strategies, supports, and linkages that help them maximize their independence.

Other Phase 2 students, however, may not have cognitive impairments but may have other disabilities that their IEP Teams have determined will make it difficult for them to participate fully and appropriately in the MEAP, even with assessment accommodations.

Phase 2 MI-Access assessments—which will be administered by grade instead of age—are currently under development. As required by federal law, the assessments will include, at a minimum, the subject areas of English language arts, mathematics, and science. They also will include career and employability skills. The assessments will not be based solely on teacher observation, but instead will incorporate a range of formats (such as multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and extended response) suitable to the student population being assessed. Phase 2 MI-Access assessments are tentatively scheduled for statewide implementation in winter 2005 (at the earliest).

Who Decides Which Assessment a Student Takes?

Each student in special education has an IEP Team. The team is typically made up of a district/school representative, a general education teacher, a special education teacher or related service provider, and the student's parents or guardians. Other adults may also participate in IEP Team meetings—such as additional teachers, additional related services providers, and other school/district representatives—as well as the student.

The IEP Team is responsible for making many decisions about a student and his or her education, such as his or her special education category and educational opportunities related to career, transition, and post-school experiences. In 1998, IEP Teams also became responsible for determining how the student should be assessed on state- and district-wide assessments (IDEA 1997).

Since 2002, IEP Teams have had statewide assessment options of the MEAP, the MEAP with assessment accommodations, MI-Access Participation, and MI-Access Supported Independence. An IEP Team can select one of those assessment options or it might find that none of the options is appropriate for the student. In that case, the team is required to determine *how else* the student will be assessed. This last option will continue until Phase 2 MI-Access is developed and implemented statewide. Once Phase 2 MI-Access is available, IEP Teams will be required to choose from the state standardized assessments in the MEAS.

When Will MI-Access Be Administered?

MI-Access is administered during the last two weeks of February through the month of March. It is very important that all observations be completed during that time to ensure that districts receive assessment reports in a timely manner.

Assessment administrators will have six weeks during which to make their observations—much longer than the MEAP's two-week assessment window. During that time, teachers or other special education professionals will observe students while they participate in a standard set of assessment activities.

How Will Phase 1 MI-Access Results Be Reported?

BETA/TASA—the MI-Access operational contractor—will distribute a number of assessment reports that provide information on student performance on each performance expectation (PE) assessed by Phase 1 MI-Access. These will include Individual Student Reports, customized Parent Reports, Summary Reports, Listing Reports, Frequency Reports, and Participation Rate Reports. In addition, the reports will be accompanied by a results handbook designed to help parents, teachers, schools, and districts interpret and use assessment results in meaningful ways.

How Will the State Use MI-Access Results?

At a minimum, MI-Access results will be used as part of Education Yes!—Michigan’s accreditation system—and to prepare reports necessary to comply with federal legislation, such as IDEA and NCLB. In addition, it will be used in the state-level continuous improvement process and to help target state efforts for technical assistance and personnel development.